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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [POLITICAL](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHISTAN: OPPOSITION LEADER FEARS
ADMINISTRATIVE MANIPULATION OF ELECTIONS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN ORDWAY FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Ak Zhol party leader Alikhan Baimenov voiced concern over a tightening of party financing and the possibility of administrative manipulation of presidential elections in a June 23rd meeting with Ambassador Ordway. He admitted increasing prosperity of the electorate but hoped an anti-corruption pitch would attract disgruntled voters. The former regime insider claimed continuing contact with the presidential administration and hinted at an upcoming meeting with the president. He hoped that the democratic vote would be larger in Kazakh-majority regions than in mixed. Baimenov plans a trip to Washington in mid-July. End Summary.

Money Drying Up

12. (C) Baimenov complained of an increasingly shrinking pool of those willing to finance opposition politics. He said that all businessmen were connected with the authorities, "even those that help the opposition." The absence of "middle class", according to him, left about "six-seven businessmen" who were able of forming and financing a party. Authorities were actively "ferreting" out those in the business community supporting the opposition. (Note: In a conversation a week later, Sarsanbayev of the rival Ak Zhol faction also said that money was increasingly difficult to get. End Note)

13. (C) Baimenov said the split in the party was in part caused by attempts--he did not identify the actors--to bring in shady money, especially that of former Prime Minister Nurlan Balgimbayev. He is reportedly involved in the Giffen affair.

Cadres decide the day

14. (C) Baimenov, himself a former head of the Presidential Administration (1998-9), lamented that even if Nazarbayev wanted free and fair presidential elections, local governors (akims) and the presidential administration might revert to old habits fearing a low turn-out for the President. "Their future depends on it." He pegged presidential elections for this December. Baimenov claimed that those around the President "put it in his head" that he has 90% support. First Deputy Head of the Administration Tazhin "has learned to tell him what he wants to hear" and will not let the vote "fall under seventy percent." He related that as head of the Presidential Administration he told akims 65-66% of the vote would suffice in 1999 presidential elections. Nazarbayev polled 82% in those elections.

15. (C) Amendments to the constitution increasing the role of the parliament in the run-up to the election would, according to Baimenov, send a clear signal to aparatichiks that the President wanted a level-playing field. (Note: On June 30th, Nazarbayev announced that he saw no need to amend the constitution. End Note). Should the regime drive up results, Baimenov fears a presidential post-election euphoria that will hamstring reform.

But we can do better!

16. (C) Baimenov was extremely realistic about the popularity of the president (high) and the chances of the opposition (modest). He told how he sent AK Zhol activists to the market to read the pulse of the traders. They reported that people thought they were doing "better today than they were yesterday." He countered, however, by arguing that, "Think of how we could do without the corruption."

Fear of Limited Unrest

17. (C) Baimenov, who indicated that he met frequently with members of the Presidential Administration and hinted at an

upcoming meeting with the President himself, confided that insiders fear election-driven disorder. He added, however, that they worried about isolated pockets, not wide-spread unrest. As proof he pointed to a large police presence, one hundred officers, that accompanied him on a visit to a small settlement (10,000) in rural Aktau province.

18. (C) He also lamented what he claimed to be official manipulation of the congress of the "Union of Muslims of Kazakhstan", held in early June. The congress reelected Abasattar Derbisali, a loyal supporter of Nazarbayev, as head mufti. Baimenov said that the "the authorities set them up", adding that Kazakhstan did not need "weak muftis". The Ambassador said that he gave the same message to the authorities, namely that the state should not seek to manipulate religion or religious groups.

Strength in Numbers -----

9.(C) Baimenov believed that pro-democracy sentiments are stronger in majority Kazakh areas (Kizilorda, Chimkent, Mangistau) than in areas with a mixed population, such as Petropavlovsk. He reasoned that where Kazakhs felt they "are the bosses" there is less fear that a regime change may result in "a return of the Communists" (Russians).

10. (C) Comment: Baimenov is more pragmatic, and less inclined to confrontation, than the rest of the opposition. Charges whispered by other oppositionists that he is a stalking horse for Nazarbayev, strike us as a mischaracterization of his views and position. His strong commitment to change -- particularly to overcome corruption -- was evident throughout the conversation, and he showed every sign of being sincerely opposed to President Nazarbayev. While he has engaged in some limited, quiet exchanges with some of Nazarbayev's confidantes, the fact that he has neither taken his seat in the Mazhlis (the sole seat won by the opposition in last fall's election), nor participated in the National Commission on Democratization, keep him firmly and publicly in the opposition camp. His proposed trip to Washington will offer an opportunity to hear from the pragmatic, but nonetheless very real wing of Kazakhstan's opposition movement. End Comment
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